

Albert B. Ramsdell,

Salem, Mass.



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OR,
CLEANING OUT THE GULF GANG.

A Romance of the Lower Coast.

BY ED. L. WHEELER,
AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS, "ROSE-
BUD ROB," NOVELS, "SIERRA SAM,"
NOVELS, ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.
THE STRANGER.

Way down on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico
is a little town known as Snug Harbor, but
more popularly called Smuggler's Harbor.

Here, for years, has existed a colony of people,
whose occupation was ostensibly that of fisher-
men and wreckers.

"DIDN'T I HEAR A VOICE?" SHE ASKED. "YES. HELP! I SHALL DROWN!" CRIED
THE BOUND DICK.

This, however, was a delusion, a snare to cover the real business, which was smuggling.

The chief supply of smuggled goods came from Cuba, Mexico and Central America, and in defiance of the United States revenue laws large quantities of liquor, wines, cigars, silks, etc., were brought into the States at an enormous profit. Revenue officers appeared to be powerless to suppress the unlawful traffic.

It went on just as though the officers were in league with the "dodgers."

Smugglers' Harbor contained one hundred inhabitants. It's "business" buildings consisted of one grocery, a tavern and a blacksmith shop.

Jim Oaks was boss of the town, and also landlord of the tavern, the most important resort in the Harbor.

He was more, he was chief of the smugglers, owned a schooner and a fast horse, and kept two "niggers" as servants—all of which made him the "leading citizen" of this rough and remote region below Corpus Christi Pass.

The tavern was a long low building built of sun-baked brick and shale lime concrete.

The very appearance of the place, from an exterior view, was suggestive of danger.

Strangers of course were a rarity in the place. Once in awhile a straggling revenue agent came poking around to see what he could find out, but he never discovered anything, or, if he did, he never took his information out of the settlement, because most likely, he was never seen again! For the citizens were a hard lot, who clung together—drank and swore together—fought together; and every time a stranger entered the place he was at once set down as a detective, and was hustled in no gentle manner.

Only one road approached the town, and this was watched, night and day, so that no spy could steal in unawares. Yet, one wild, stormy night, when the waters of the Gulf were lashing themselves into fury against the coast, a stranger did ride into Smugglers' Harbor.

This stranger had a round, full face, dark-brown eyes and hair, a rather sunburnt complexion, and an athletic, symmetrical figure that indicated strength.

He was attired in a plain business suit, and the horse he bestrode was a fine one, at a glance.

He drew rein before the tavern, which bore the suggestive name of "Guzzler's Glory," dismounted, hitched his horse to the post, and entered the bar-room.

Here he halted, near the door, and looked over the assemblage.

Then, turning abruptly, he left the saloon, mounted his horse and rode away.

That was the last seen of him, that night.

The next night, at precisely the same time he reappeared, and repeated the action.

People of dull mind as most of Jim Oaks's patrons were, could not understand it, and began to get superstitious.

Who was he? What did his singular action mean?

No one could answer.

This sort of maneuver was continued every night for a week, until Jim Oaks began to "hustle," and on the sixth night, Jim called a meeting.

"Boys!" he said, "aire we goin' ter stand this funny business any longer?"

"No!"

"Well, what's ter be done?"

"Kill him!"

"Who's goin' ter do it?"

"Draw lots."

"That won't work. I think Hoon orter be the man!"

Hank Hoon was the champion liar and swearer of the Harbor.

Old Hoon grunted.

"How much is ther' in it?" he demanded.

"Nothing."

"Then count me out!"

"Well, say ten dollars!"

"Not much! I ain't a ten-dollar man!"

"It wouldn't be the first time you have killed a man!" grimly observed Oaks. "If you had your deserts, you'd be in prison, now!"

"How about you? You've got nothin' to brag of, as I know. Jest you sail over inter Arkansas, whar ye cum from, and see how soon they will scoop ye up, and scuttle ye."

"Heer, boys," interposed a veteran named Keck, better known as The Kicker, "thar's no use o' quarrelin' over sech trivial matter. You two act like sheep without salt. What is the use o' twittin' each other? Thar ain't neither of ye saints—not much!"

"Mebbe you're one?"

"I hain't got no pretensions ter bein' one, but, I'll bet my shirt I stand as good as any o' you."

This ended the dispute.

Jim Oaks looked at the clock; then he drew out his "gun"—a revolver—and laid it on the bar.

"Time fer that cuss to come," he announced,

"Mebbe he won't come."

"Yes he will. I am sart'in of it!" and he was right, for just then, the door opened and the stranger walked into the room and approached the bar with a bland smile.

"Good-evening, sir," he saluted. "Do any of you gents lubricate?"

Did they?

For answer the whole assembly marched up to the bar as they might have done if going to battle, and in a voice nominated their medicine.

Even the boss of the tavern, or Cast-Iron Jim, as he was best known, among his colleagues, tucked his six-shooter away in his hip pocket, and joined the brigade.

The drinks were poured out of a row of bottles to the number of a dozen, but, before they were partaken of, Jim leaned over the bar, and looked the stranger sternly in the eye.

"Now, lookee heer, mister!" he said, grimly. "It's all well enough to ask us to drink, but before we h'ist elbows with you, or any other stranger, we want to know who we are drinkin' with—eh, boys?"

"You bet!" was the emphatic response.

"Certainly," replied the stranger with the utmost blandness. "I am a tourist, travelin' through the country on a pleasure trip. My name is Sam Jones. I used to herd cattle, in the Texas Pan Handle. I was then known as Hurricane Sam. Since I've taken a rise in life, however, I float under the name of Don Dare from San Antonio."

At this the crowd was all attention.

If this man's story was true, he must have considerable boodle, and that was particularly scarce, just at this time, in Smugglers' Harbor.

Gales had been raging over the Gulf for a period of nearly two weeks, so it was a dangerous thing to venture outside the little harbor or to run into it, so all hands were ready and eager for a little "work."

Cast-Iron Jim, in particular, seemed to see the necessity of making things comfortable for the stranger, for he said:

"Ye'r welcome to ther hospitality of our town, Mr. Dare. But, thar is one thing in ther common course o' human events that me an' the boys would like ter know!"

"What is that, sir?"

"Why, what ye meant by that coming-in-and-goin'-out racket of yourn!"

Dare laughed.

"Oh! that is only a way I have. I sized your crowd up, and concluded that they were a pretty hard crowd, and went away. Then, I changed my mind, and came back to have another look at them. Thus I paid several visits, until I came to the conclusion that it was a pretty safe place to put up, so I

came, to-night, to stay, if you'll give me a room. By the way let's lubricate again!"

And they did.

Had Don Dare disarmed the gang of all suspicions?

Not quite; but, as there were no "contraband" goods in the town just then, no one cared whether he was Don Dare, of San Antonio, or Don Diable, of the U. S. Revenue Service.

CHAPTER II.

OAKS'S EDICT.

As stated, the town of Snug Harbor was on the Gulf—not immediately on the Gulf shore, but on a bay or bayou, which gave it the right to be called a harbor.

It consisted of a straggling string of shanties, of the primitive sort, common to the coast.

There was only one house that had a more comfortable appearance than the rest, and this belonged to a man named May—Hiram May.

May, though a cripple, who had to go about on crutches, was rich, but nobody knew just how rich, as no one knew where he kept his money.

He had come to town accompanied by his daughter—then a girl-woman of eighteen, and very handsome,

No one knew anything about the antecedents of the man, but it was vaguely hinted that he was an ex-pirate, and as a pirate had acquired his wealth.

However this might be, the Mays lived comfortably.

They associated with no one, and so they had no visitors to pry into their family affairs, and but few of the villagers had ever been inside their house, but these few had reported that it was handsomely furnished.

Not far from the home of the Mays, was a little shanty or hut occupied by a being known as "Suke."

If he had any other name, it was not known. He was a man of fifty, with snow-white hair and beard, which was the only redeeming thing about his appearance, for, otherwise, he was a monstrosity.

His form was dwarfed; his legs were bowed and of great size, and he could touch the ground with his finger-tips, so long were his arms.

His head was large—unduly so—and his face distorted by a big mouth with thick lips, and bulging, owl-like eyes that winked and blinked incessantly.

Such was old "Suke."

Among the rude townspeople, he was regarded with fear, for he was vicious and revengeful, and treacherous; but he was regarded as a prophet, and his predictions, singularly enough, generally came true.

He could foretell the approach of a storm, the state of the weather a week ahead, what would occur on such and such a day and so forth.

If the smugglers wanted to know the locality of their best ship, and the date of its arrival, he could tell them. If a suspicious craft was cruising near the harbor, he seemed to know it. If there was any danger menacing the smugglers, he reported it to Jim Oaks.

Old Suke walked into the tavern, the night of the stranger's reception, and glanced about him.

Don Dare had retired to the room assigned to him, and the majority of the gang had gone to their homes.

The arrival of Suke caused a ripple of excitement among those who still were there, for he never visited the tavern unless there was some strong reason for doing so.

"Well, Suke?" demanded Jim Oaks, "what brings you out to-night? Come up and have a snifter!"

Old Suke was never averse to accepting

an invitation to drink, and accordingly imbibed "three-fingers" of Cast-Iron Jim's "wet groceries" with a relish.

"That ain't bad whisky," he observed. "It goes right to the spot whar et were intended fer. Gim' me some more, an' then I've got suthin' ter tell ye."

Oaks gave him another drink.

"Now, then, what hev ye got ter tell?"

Suke looked around the room before he ventured a reply.

"The Shark will be here to-morrow night, at midnight!" he answered.

"Impossible!" replied Oaks. "She is not due for a week, yet."

"Nevertheless, she will be here."

"What does she bring?"

"Mostly rice, but somethin' else."

"What else?"

"A rich and beautiful woman!"

"Get out! You're dreaming!"

"Not a bit of it. I saw her, last night, in my dreams."

"What is her name?"

"Thet I don't know, but I can tell ye one thing—she brings wealth with her, and wads of it too, and if my dream is true, it is all fer old Hiram May."

Cast-Iron Jim laughed, boisterously.

"Reckon you've been suckin' that opium pipe of yourn, too hard, brother Suke," he said. "Your brain seems unusually imaginative, it strikes me. What woman would be fool enough to bring money to such an old cuss as Hiram May? You're crazy!"

"You lie!"

Now, under most circumstances, this is a fighting word, and Jim Oaks would have unhesitatingly shot any other man than Suke, for using it, but he was afraid of the prophet, and, besides, Suke was too valuable a man to kill off for a trivial offense; so he paid no attention to the insult, but said:

"Well, if the schooner is to arrive, we must make preparations, accordingly. We're hard up for money and grub, and it is necessary we get some soon, for the boys are becoming restless."

"I've got more news," added old Suke.

"Well, let's have it!"

"Gim'me a drink, first."

It was given him.

"Now, then," said Oaks, "unloosen that tongue o' yourn."

"You've got a guest, hain't yer?" demanded Suke.

"Yes. Have you seen him?"

"No, I haven't."

"Then how do you happen to know that he is here?"

"I dreamed last night, that a man was coming, and now you have just confirmed my dream."

"What sort of a man do you expect?"

"One that is young, dashing, handsome—born to be admired."

"Do you know what the business of this man is?"

"He is another of those prowlin' detectives, only a hundred times sharper than the average!"

"I don't believe it!"

"Well, believe what you please. I've told you, and now, if you get nipped, it's yer own fault," and with this the old man left the tavern.

Jim Oaks's countenance assumed a very savage expression.

He poured out a drink of gin, and swallowed it at a gulp.

There was fire in his eye, and murder in his heart.

He laid his revolver on the bar, and called up his crowd.

"Boyees!" he said, "ther' is trouble brewin' in this town."

"Trouble?" echoed the Kicker. "What kind o' trouble, cap'n?"

"Thar's another o' them detective cusses in camp. Leastwise, so old Suke says."

"Whar is he?"

"Up-stairs in bed. It's the fellow what cum to-night—Don Dare."

A growl of anger went up from the gang.

"I, for one, don't believe the young feller is a detective," said the Kicker. "Old Suke is a fool."

"Old Suke knows more in a minute than you know in an hour," Oaks retorted. "I say the feller is a detective, and he's got to be squelched."

"Who's goin' ter do the job?"

"Waal, we'll have to draw lots to decide that," Oaks replied. "The feller must be got rid of this very night, for a very good reason."

"What reason?"

"Suke says the Shark will arrive to-morrow night."

"Suke be blowed!" cried the Kicker. "How does he know anything about it? It's impossible for her to arrive so soon. I'll bet my boots he don't know anything about the Shark!"

"It don't matter if he does or don't. The detective is our enemy, and he must die!"

CHAPTER III.

THE KICKER'S TRICK AND JIM OAKS'S "SICKNESS."

THE Kicker really was an arrant coward, therefore the edict of his colleagues, that he must kill Don Dare, struck terror to his heart.

He commit a murder—he, Ebenezer Kick, who had never done anything worse than assisting the smugglers, and stealing when the chance afforded?

No! It was not to be thought of.

So he arose to explain:

"Boys," he said, "you must excuse me. I can't undertake the job. Not 'cause I am 'fraid, for cowards isn't in the Kick family. Such a job requires a clear head, and stiddy nerves, which I haven't got. I should make a bungle of the business, sure; so you'd best let out the job to some other hand as kin do it up scientific."

"Oh! ye can't, hey?" roared Cast-Iron Jim, savagely. "Waal, we'll see about that. Ef ye can't ye will an' I'll sw'ar to that!"

"Yes, yer head is level, thar, capt'in," said Bill McGregor, better known as the Butcher. "Ther's skeercely any doubt but what the feller aire a detective, and ef he is, down goes his shanty. We don't want no sneaks ner spies around *this* camp, an', what's more, we ain't goin' ter have 'em. What sort of cargo aire the Shark bringin', this trip?"

"A beautiful Cubanese, for one thing, who brings loads of gold with her—so Suke says. I cannot say for the rest, for she was not due 'til next week, when she was to bring cigars, rice and brandy."

"Well, we must get ready to receive her. Who's going to do the detective? That's ther first important matter to be considered, I reckon!"

"I propose we take a vote!" suggested one of the party.

"Not a bad idea," assented Oaks. "I'll take the liberty of presenting the Kicker for your approval, gentlemen!"

"I second the motion!" cried one of the gang.

"I third it!"

"I fourth it!"

And so it went until it had gone the rounds.

The Kicker was selected to "do" the detective, if such he was.

"Carried, unanimously!" cried Bill McGregor. "The Kicker must slit the detective's weazand, while he sleeps. Ain't I right, pard's?"

"Right ye aire," was the ominous response.

"Oh! no! no!" cried the Kicker. "I

can't, cap'n, really can't. I never did commit a murder, and I never will. You must let up on me—really you must. I—I—"

"Shet up! Either you do the job, or I'll do you. D'ye hear?" and Oaks drew his revolver. "Go see this heer tool. Waal, it's called a 'bulldog,' and it bites five times in succession when properly handled. Now, jest you decide ef you will do the job or not. Ef you will, say so. Ef you won't, say so, and I will proceed to blow your brains out, here, now. Come! speak!"

Poor Kicker! What was he to do? He had no alternative but obey. He knew Jim Oaks to be a wretch who hesitated at nothing, that he would just as lief shoot a man as look at him, if anything was to be gained by it, or to satisfy his brutal passions.

"Oh! Cap'n!" cried the Kicker, making a last appeal, "won't you let me off? I never can get through the job. I'd die of fright—I know I would!"

"No, I'll not let you off!" declared Oaks, gruffly. "Either you promise to do the job or you drop!"

"Well, I promise;" assented the Kicker, tearfully. "What time has the deed got to be did?"

"At midnight. There will be no one up and around then."

"Why not wait 'til near morning? He will be sleeping sounder, then!"

"Oh, no!" replied Oaks, with a knowing grin, "ye can't git out o' it that way, Mr. Kicker, not much! When the hands on ther clock, yonder, sez twelve, ye'r' ter sail in, and stick a knife inter ther feller, an' I'll see that ye do et, too."

The Kicker shuddered.

It was nearly twelve o'clock, already, only half an hour intervening!

If the Kicker could have got out of the tavern, he certainly would have taken "leg-bail," and his face would never have been seen in Snug Harbor again, but, he knew that escape was out of the question.

Bill McGregor had stationed himself at the door, ready to intercept any one who wished to but was not to be permitted to escape.

The other members of the gang were lounging about, drinking and smoking, and discussing the arrival of the smuggling craft, the Shark, the following night.

Jim Oaks stood behind his bar, grim and merciless.

As for poor Kick, he paced up and down the room, in a pitiful frame of mind, his face as pale as death, itself.

Finally, when the clock on the wall indicated a quarter to twelve, he approached the bar, staggeringly:

"Ef I'm ter do the job, give me whisky to brace up my nerves!" he said hoarsely, "and if you've got any arsenic, put that in too, for after this, I don't want to live!"

Cast-Iron Jim shrugged his shoulders.

"You kin hev all ther whisky ye want!" he said, "but, no arsenic. We can't afford to part with a valuable member of society like you, just yet, not much. You are too useful!"

And, with a sardonic laugh, he set the black bottle and a glass upon the bar.

The Kicker disdained to notice the glass, but, seizing the bottle, he glued his lips to the mouth of it, and tipping it up, allowed the entire contents to gurgle down his throat! this done he staggered to a chair, and in less time than it takes to tell it, he was hopelessly unconscious.

He had defeated the aims of Oaks, after all! In vain they attempted to arouse him. He was so dead drunk that, had a cannon been fired near at hand, it would not have aroused him from his unconsciousness. Oaks was both enraged and amused. There was a humorous side to the man's nature, but it was, as a matter of course, of the ruffian sort.

"Cuss the luck!" he growled. "He beat me at my own game! No use of tryin' ter

wake him for hours to come. Chuck him in the street. If he freezes, let him freeze!"

This order was obeyed, and the Kicker was deposited outside, none too gently.

Had the gang considered, this was the best thing they could have done, to bring him back to consciousness.

The gang returned to the bar-room, and this time lots were drawn, to determine who was to do the business for Don Dare.

The lot fell to Jim Oaks himself!

"Well, ef it's me, so be it!" he growled. "It's got ter be did, and you can bet I will make a sure job of it, if ever any one would."

Then, imbibing a stiff horn of whisky as a "bracer," he entered the next room, and closed the door behind him.

It now looked bad for Donald Dare!

The gang waited in suspense, listening and momentarily expecting to hear a death-yell.

But none did they hear.

Don Dare had been assigned a room in the loft of the tavern—it really couldn't be called a second story, so low was the ceiling.

To reach this, several rooms had to be passed through after leaving the bar-room. Then you had to climb a ladder, in lieu of stairs.

Ten minutes passed.

"I'll bet somethin' is wrong!" said the Butcher. "Jim orter be back before this, eh?"

"So he had. Mebbe t'other feller war at home when Jim called, and got the drop on him!"

Just then the tavern-keeper re-entered the bar-room, looking as if he had been having a set-to with a wildcat.

Blood was streaming from wounds on his face, and his clothing was saturated with the same.

"Great Scott, man! what's the matter?" cried McGregor, springing up.

"He's gone!" gasped Oaks, and then tumbled to the floor in a faint.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MAYS AT HOME.

THE same night that the foregoing incidents were occurring, Hiram May and his daughter sat in their pleasant home, before a ruddy fire that blazed and crackled up on the hearth.

May was a man of some fifty odd years, with a rather genial countenance, and dark eyes that contrasted strangely with his snowy beard and hair.

One of his lower limbs was so drawn up with rheumatism that he was forced to walk with crutches, when he moved at all.

Minnie May, his daughter, was very fair, with golden hair, blue eyes, and tempting mouth with rosy lips, which, when she smiled, betrayed a glimpse of pearly teeth.

She possessed a sylph-like figure, and dressed charmingly, although inexpensively.

Of jewelry, she wore none, her own personal beauty making up for the lack of adorning gems.

Hiram May sat in his easy-chair, on one side of the fire-place; his daughter sat on the other, gazing meditatively into the leaping flames.

"Daughter," said the old man, "I see that Cal Caruthers don't call around, any more. How do you account for that? I thought you two were famous friends—lovers, in fact!"

"Nothing of the sort, papa. Mr. Caruthers's visits ceased of his own accord. I believe he suddenly left town, though what for, I have no idea. I don't imagine his leave-taking will worry any one!"

"But, my dear, I thought you liked him," protested the old man. "You two always seemed to get along like turtle-doves, and I look forward to see Caruthers my son-in-law!"

"I did like him, at one time," Minnie re-

plied, frankly, "but something he told me has changed my views."

"What did he tell you?"

"It is not necessary that you should know, papa!"

"It is, and I demand to know. No daughter of mine shall keep a secret from me. Tell me, at once!"

"I refuse. If, as you have said, I cared for Mr. Caruthers, I would be using him unjustly to reveal his secret to another."

This retort rather settled the matter, so far as Hiram May was concerned. He wanted to see her married to a good man, and Cal Caruthers was about the only steady-going, exemplary young man at Snug Harbor.

He was an all-round worker, and he could turn his hand to 'most any sort of labor, and do it well.

He neither smoked, drank nor gambled, and, as far as he was able, he saved his earnings.

But, about a week before our story, Calvin Caruthers had ceased visiting Minnie, and had vanished from the town.

Whither he had gone, or for what purpose, no one seemed to know, and even less to care, for he was not over-popular among the rough spirits of the town.

He cared nothing for their games of chance; drink he would not, and night either had found him in the society of Minnie May, or in his own humble room, poring over some book.

Now, he was gone!

Old Hiram May shook his head, dubiously.

"There's a screw loose, some'res," he said, "and I'll bet on it. Cal didn't go away of his own free will, 'thout comin' to say good-bye. He and I were too good friends, for that. Suthin's happened to the boy, I'm sure."

Minnie turned a trifle paler.

"How do you mean, papa?" she asked. "Surely everybody liked him!"

The old man shrugged his shoulders, knowingly.

"Dunno about that," he said. "I've heard it remarked that some of Jim Oaks's gang were not desperately in love with him, for fear he would give away their secret!"

"But, surely, they would not do him any injury?"

"I don't know about that, my dear; the men of Oaks's gang are a tough set, and are to be feared even under ordinary circumstances. Jim Oaks is no better than the rest of 'em, and if it wasn't that they dare not touch me, you'd be without your old daddy, now."

Minnie May shuddered.

"I thoroughly detest that man, Oaks!" she declared. "But, how is it, papa, that they dare not, or, at least, do not bother you?"

The old man shrugged his shoulders, and chuckled.

"Now, I've got you!" he said. "You refused to tell *your* secret, so I refuse to tell *you* mine. How will you swap?"

"Not at all!"

"Very well. Mine will keep, without getting rusty."

Just then there came a heavy rap on the outside door.

"I wonder who that can be?" said Hiram May. "Here it's after midnight, bless my soul if it ain't! A nice hour for callers. Minnie, go to the door, and see who is there!"

"Oh! papa, I dare not! I am too afraid."

"Humph!" and seizing his crutches, May hobbled to the door, and threw it open.

As he did so, Jim Oaks, bloodstained and horrible to behold, staggered in out of the now pouring rain.

May and his daughter both shrunk back in alarm, and with exclamations of surprise.

"Oh! ye needn't be skeered!" the smuggler chieftain said, seating himself. "I ain't going ter harm ye, ef ye act civil-like. All I want is ter be used *white*. Where's that cuss who dug me up?"

"What fellow? I don't understand you!"

"I mean the cuss as calls hisself Don Dare. Oh! you needn't let on innocent. Et won't work—not with *me*! You've got him hid and I want ye ter trot him out, 'til I get another go at him."

"I know nothing of any Don Dare, sir, nor am I harboring any one. You are laboring under a mistaken idea."

"Bab! Do you think that I'm a fool?"

"No one said so."

"Then trot out that galoot or there will be ructions in this camp. He clawed me and he chawed me, and now, by thunder, I mean to have revenge! I'll descend on him like a double-barreled thunderbolt, and I'll tear him inter whip-cords, and sell his bones to some fertilizin' mill. That's what I'll do—I, James Oaks!"

"I insist that I know nothing about this man, and, Jim Oaks, you know better than to create a disturbance in my house. If some one has been giving you a licking, why, it is no more than you deserve. You will get no sympathy here."

"Who's askin' for sympathy? All I want is to get at Don Dare!"

"You will have to look elsewhere for him, I repeat, for he is not here nor has he been here."

Jim Oaks shrugged his shoulders.

"Humph! Well, it's your bulge now, but this independence is about played out. When *she* comes, then you will change your tune!"

"She?"

"Yes, *she*!"

"I don't understand you."

"You don't? Very singular. She is a Cuban lady, and her business here aire party important!"

Hiram May turned pale.

"What do you know?" he demanded, in unsteady tones.

"I know a lot," Oaks replied, in triumph. "About the best thing you and I can do is to have a private interview, when, perhaps, arrangements can be made, that will save you no end of trouble. Sabe?"

CHAPTER V.

OAKS UNFOLDS A TALE

HIRAM MAY evidently came to the conclusion that it would be better to grant the interview, for, turning to his daughter, he said, in a kindly tone:

"We will excuse you for a few minutes, my child. Mr. Oaks and I have some business matters to talk over."

"But you never ordered me out of the room before, papa," Minnie said, with a pretty pout.

"True, but you must go now, my dear. Oaks and myself wish to be alone."

Accordingly, Minnie arose, and went into the adjoining room, her eyes moist with tears.

"When will this mystery ever cease?" she murmured. "There is some secret connected with my life that I cannot fathom. I am sometimes tempted to believe that Hiram May is not my real father, although he is so kind to me!"

When she had left the room, May turned fiercely upon the smuggler captain.

"Now, then, Jim Oaks, what do you want?" he demanded.

"Money," was the laconic response.

"Money! What for? I don't owe you anything."

"But you will."

"How so?"

"For bringing over the beautiful Cuban lady, on my smuggling craft. I seldom handle so precious a cargo, and before I land her I must collect duty!"

Hiram May uttered a vicious growl.

"I was never in Cuba in my life!" he cried.

"You lie!" Jim Oaks replied. "Don't think I don't know all about it, or you will get left, for I do! Shall I rehearse to you the rest of the story?"

"You cannot. You are only surmising."

"I am not. I will prove it!"

Hiram May glanced apprehensively toward the door of the next room, and then said:

"Go ahead! I want to see how much you do and do not know. If you know too much—"

"What then!"

"Why it won't be healthy for you—that's all!"

Jim Oaks laughed, boisterously.

"Just as if *you* could do any one any harm, you old impostor! Why, I could knock the stars out of you before you could say Jack Robinson!"

"Ef you've got anything important to say, why heave ahead and say it."

"All right! Here goes:

"Something like twenty years ago, thar lived in ther city o' Havana, Cuba, an Englishman, named Gifford, who was the owner of vast estates, in Cuba, which he had purchased with money illegally obtained in England, for which he had to leave that country.

"He was a proud, stuck-up sort of a man, and had but few associates, or friends, for that matter, but at last he fell in love with Inez La Trask, a Cuban girl, and married her, when she was only fifteen years of age.

"Waal, they lived together until a darter was born; then Gifford had a quarrel with Inez's brother, and killed him, in a duel.

"Shortly after this, Gifford got word that permission had been granted him to return to England, and that he had fallen heir to a large estate.

"Gambling had loaded his Havana property with a debt, and so he concluded to go back to where he came from.

"But, what was he to do with his dark-skinned wife and daughter, who had now become an incumbrance to him? His English pride rebelled against introducing a Cubanese as his wife. Then, too, he looked forward to a life of gayety, in London, and perhaps a better matrimonial alliance—scamp that he was:

"No, no! et wouldn't do fer ter take her to England. She must be got rid of, an' so must the kid who resembled the mother. About this time you, a half-brother of Gifford, turned up in Havana, after a tough piratical career on ther Spanish Main. You were hard up for cash, and war susceptible ter monetary inducement.

"Finding this, Walter Gifford made a bar gain with you. You were to kidnap his child, bring it to America, and raise it the same as if was your own. For doing this you were to receive five hundred pounds, yearly, and your step-brother's blessing. Jest ther par value o' the latter I don't know, but I reckon ye didn't reckon it werry high. Anyhow, the child was spirited away, and you disappeared at the same time.

"Walter Gifford went to England, leaving his wife heart-broken, in Havana, and giving her warning that, if she attempted to follow him, he would have her put out of the way. Being a rather faint-hearted creature she dared not follow him, but the loss of husband and child preyed so upon her mind, that for a time she was a raving maniac, and had to be placed in confinement.

"She eventually recovered, however, and then, fired with a spirit of revenge, she went to England and hunted up Gifford. He was a wreck of his former self—one of the worst wretches of Whitechapel.

"Finding him in this condition my lady let her vengeance go by, and left London. Shortly afterward she came into a fortune in

her own right, and set out to find her child, and now she is coming to Snug Harbor, on my schooner, the *Shark*. She must have struck the trail at last, and knows her daughter is here."

Hiram May looked anxious.

To give up the child he had reared from babyhood would break his heart.

No, no! he could not think of that. Minnie had just arrived at an age when she was a pride and a comfort to him.

"How did you learn all this?" he asked.

"That don't matter."

"I believe you are lying to me."

"It is your privilege to believe whatever you please. The question is, do you want to give up her who is known as your daughter?"

"No, no, no!"

"But, you will have to, if the mother lands, d'ye see?"

"Then, she must not land."

"But, how is it to be prevented?"

"You can prevent it!"

Oaks chuckled.

"Kerrect! An' it's well ye admit it!" the ruffian rejoined. "I'm the only one who can prevent Inez Gifford from finding her offspring."

It will be noticed that Jim Oaks often dropped his rude vernacular and spoke in correct English.

May observed this. He had all along believed that Oaks had seen better days, and was better educated than he appeared in his every-day life. Now, he was convinced of it.

"There's another point I haven't disclosed to you," Oaks went on. "The estates which Walter Gifford inherited in England, and which were taken away from him by a legal process, owing to his wild habits, still belong to his heir or heirs—that is to say, his children, if any be living. Consequently, the young lady you call your daughter, is the heiress. If she falls into the hands of Inez Gifford, it's not difficult to say what will become of her, or her fortune."

"True! true!" Hiram May said. "She must never see her mother. I will take her to England myself, and establish her rights. If there is anything to be made out of it, I am entitled to share it, being as I have been so long her guardian, and have always cared for her, as though she were my own. Ha! ha! fancy old Hiram May, as the head of a grand English household!"

"Exactly," assented Oaks. "You ought to have your share of the spoils. But, where the deuce do I come in?"

"What do you expect out of it?"

"As much as you. I'm getting a little tired of leading a smuggler's life, and I would like to go back to England, and lead the life of a gentleman of leisure, once more."

"Then you once led that sort of life?" said Hiram May.

Oaks laughed, grimly.

"I was once known in the swell clubs of London—the Oxford, the Canterbury, and such! If I hadn't been a fool I'd be a member this day."

"Well, Mr. Oaks, I'm much obliged to you for this interview," said Hiram May. "As for giving you money out of Minnie's estate, if she has one, that is out of the question. The child shall have all that belongs to her except what I require—which will be a very modest amount if it is to come from her estate."

"Well, suppose Mrs. Inez Gifford has a word to say about that? She is the legal guardian of her own child!"

"But, she must not come here! It will take some time for me to get ready to go to England, and, in the mean time, she must not land in Snug Harbor!"

"I don't know what's to prevent it, unless I interfere, and if I do it will cost money!"

There was a silence, and the two men

glared at each other. Plain to be seen there was no love between them.

At length Oaks spoke again:

"It is in my power," he said, "to prevent Inez Gifford from coming ashore. It is, likewise, in my power to show her her daughter. It is also in my power to put you in a tight place, on the charge of kidnapping. To prevent my doing anything detrimental to your interests, I shall require money."

"How much money do you want, to see that Inez Gifford does not come ashore?" May asked.

Oaks did not immediately reply, but for a few minutes seemed plunged in deep thought.

Finally, he said

"The job can't be did for nothing; and besides, there's a good deal at stake. It will cost you a matter of twenty thousand dollars, Mr. May, to prevent Inez Gifford from landing at Snug Harbor. On receipt of that amount I will see that you are not molested."

"Twenty thousand dollars? Why, man, you are surely mad!"

"Not at all!" and Oaks arose. "If you conclude to pay it, come around and see me. If not, Inez Gifford will find a champion in me!"

With this Oaks took his departure.

CHAPTER VI.

DICK ON THE LOOKOUT.

As the reader may have already surmised, the man who had presented himself at Jim Oaks's tavern as Don Dare, was none other than our old and redoubtable friend, Deadwood Dick.

He had received a commission from the Government to visit Snug Harbor, and investigate the reported smuggling operations, with orders to call for military aid to help capture the smugglers, in case he found out who they were.

The Government authorities had intimations that an immense traffic was being illegally done, and had selected Bristol as best able to investigate the matter, seeing what a record he had made on equally difficult cases.

So, the tireless sleuthhound of the law had come to Snug Harbor.

After going to the garret-room assigned him, as we have chronicled, with only a sputtered candle for light, he threw himself on the cot bed, with the intention of resting but not of sleeping, for, as he said to himself:

"I wouldn't like to be caught napping, in this den of cut-throats."

But, to keep awake, seemed in vain, for his eyes grew heavy, and he soon was asleep.

Not long had he slept, however, for his sense of danger made his slumber very light and without knowing why he sat bolt upright, in bed, after a few minutes' rest.

The candle had burned low, but with sufficient light to satisfy the detective that there was no one but himself in the garret.

The room had but two exits—one by the stairway, or ladder, and the other by a sky-light window.

The latter was the only available way of escape in case of emergency.

Now, thoroughly awake, Dick waited and listened, sure that mischief was brewing, and was rewarded for his vigilance, for just after midnight, Jim Oaks stole into the bedroom—a murderous looking knife in his hand.

Dick was lying perfectly quiet, and apparently, was sound asleep.

Oaks stole stealthily forward—murder clearly expressed upon his vicious face.

With one bound the supposed sleeper leaped from the bed, upon the ruffian, bore him to the floor, and, wrenching the weapon from the ruffian's hand, he flung it into the corner.

Then ensued a desperate struggle.

Dick was not long in discovering that he

was no match for the innkeeper in point of personal strength, so he finally broke away, and one leap carried him up through the open skylight, and landed him on the slanting roof, from which he slid to the ground.

He then hovered about the neighborhood to see what the result would be, expecting there would be a grand pursuit, but, there was none.

There was a hubbub in the saloon for awhile, but gradually, one by one, the topers dispersed, and finally the tavern was clothed in darkness.

Still, Deadwood Dick hovered in the vicinity, and soon after the lights were out Jim Oaks left the tavern, and made his way to the house of Hiram May.

Dick shadowed him, for he wisely concluded that by watching his movements more could be found out about the smuggler and smugglers than in any other way.

The parlor of May's house fronted on the street, and had windows on the front and one side.

So, when Oaks entered the dwelling, Deadwood Dick stole to one of the side windows, from where he secured a good view of the interior, and also obtained another advantage, for a pane of glass was broken out of the window at which he stood, and this enabled him to overhear the conversation inside.

With senses all alert, Dick saw and heard all that passed between Oaks and May.

"The Shark will be in to-morrow night," he muttered, "and if the Government authorities have been rightly informed she brings a cargo of cigars, tobacco and liquor. I must see this interesting craft, by all means."

When Jim Oaks left May's house, Dick departed also, and proceeded to an old cabin on the outskirts of the town, which had lately been used as a storage house for fishermen.

It was not the cleanest place in the world, but it was comfortable as a shelter, and Dick had taken the liberty of stabling his horse there.

And more: he had also made it the headquarters for a squad of seven Government officers who had accompanied him to this neighborhood, as assistants—men who had spent years of their lives in the service, and were to be relied upon, in case of emergency, every time.

Dick's young side-partner, Billy Bucket, was also one of the party, for, where Dick went there would the street waif follow.

A dim light was burning in the cabin when Dick reached it, and as the latch-string was out, he had no difficulty in gaining access.

Dick's arrival, of course, brought every man to his feet, expectantly.

Dick approached the fire and warmed his hands, at the same time glancing over the party, and estimating the general feeling, for he knew the men were restless.

"Well, boys, you look kind of down-spirited," Dick remarked. "I s'pose you're getting kind of tired of this sort of life?"

"Yes, we are," replied one of the men. "It's blamed dull business laying here, with nothing to do."

"Well, I reckon you will have enough to do soon. The smuggler schooner is due to-morrow night, and we must pull her without fail."

Here an elderly gentleman stepped forward—a man of commanding presence, and who evidently had an official position with the expedition.

"What is the name of this boat?" he demanded.

"The Shark," Dick replied, "and I reckon the name is appropriate, for it is a band of human sharks that runs her."

"Do you know at what hour she will arrive?"

"I do not; but I presume about midnight."

"Then it will be best to have the revenue cutter near at hand."

"Certainly, but out of sight, for the gang already know that we are after them."

The elderly man, whose name was General Hastings, reflected a few minutes.

"Then it won't do for us to leave here," he said, "for we may be needed at any moment."

"I'll go and notify the cutter, boss."

It was Billy Bucket who spoke up.

"I'm afraid you won't do," said the general. "It will require a man to perform such a mission."

"Ar'n't I a man?" demanded Billy, irritably.

"Billy can be depended on," Dick interposed. "He has served me before, in difficult cases and I'd pit him against any man in a duty like this."

"Well, if you think the boy will do, why, send him!" said the general. "I'll propose a message for the captain of the cutter while you prepare your young friend."

The message was prepared, and about an hour before daybreak, Dick and his little pard made their way to the lagune in which the little craft lay snugly hidden.

The little naptha launch was in charge of an old sailor, and in a few minutes Billy was steaming away, up the lagune to a coast inlet above Snug Harbor, wherein the revenue cutter lay, fully five miles away from the smugglers' rendezvous. The cutter was in charge of a man named Leslie, with a crew of ten men. She was a stanch craft, and had seen a good deal of service along the coast in patrolling and guarding the harbor against smuggling.

She was named the "Flyer," a name that fitted her well, for few boats could equal her in speed and alertness.

The little naptha launch soon conveyed Mr. Billy Bucket to this cutter, and he boarded her and delivered the message from General Hastings to Captain Leslie.

After perusing it the captain said:

"Good boy! good boy! This warning is timely. Go back and tell Deadwood and the general that I will have everything in readiness, and will be on the alert."

Billy returned to the launch, and returning as he came, delivered his message.

It was now broad daylight, and greater vigilance had to be observed, for there was no telling but what some of the smugglers might pay a visit to the old cabin, as there was a lot of fishing-tack'le stored there.

So a sentinel was posted to keep a strict watch.

The day dragged by slowly, and it was a sense of relief to all, evidently, when night drew on again.

It promised the party some opportunity for exercise, at any rate—and, possibly, a lively "scrimmage"—which all would enjoy immensely.

CHAPTER VII.

WAITING IN VAIN.

As soon as darkness set in, Dick left the cabin, on a tour of reconnoisance.

He first visited the beach in the vicinity where he expected the smuggling vessel to land. Nothing was learned there, however; no one was seen about.

He then went to the house of May, and peered in the parlor window, where he had stood the night previous; but although a light was burning in the room, neither May nor his daughter was visible. He did not linger there, but betook himself to the tavern, to find the usual gang present, and all were drinking at the bar.

Jim Oaks, evidently, had been treating, as he was being toasted.

"He's getting the gang in good humor for business," decided Dick. "Probably they will all have work in unloading the vessel."

As there seemed to be no indication of the

gang leaving the place immediately, Dick started back toward the cabin, and when midway between the tavern and the cabin, he was startled by a groan, close at hand. He looked about him carefully, and soon discovered, lying upon his back, in a clump of bushes, a young man of about his own age.

Both hands and feet were bound and a gag was in his mouth.

His pale, emaciated face had a gaunt, hungry appearance indicating that he had been some time without food.

"Well! here's a go!" exclaimed Dick. "I wonder if this is the work of the smugglers?"

He at once set the young man at liberty.

The victim gave a great sigh of relief when the gag was removed from his mouth, and his hands and feet were free.

Then Dick's pocket flask of brandy was placed at the poor fellow's lips. He clutched the bottle, and the amber fluid ran down his throat, until the bottle was half emptied.

Then he returned it to Deadwood Dick, gratefully.

"Thank you, sir! That is equivalent to a new lease of life. I was dying of thirst and exhaustion. Who are you? I never saw you around these parts before."

"Probably not, as I only came recently. Who are you, may I inquire, and how came you in this predicament?"

"My name is Caruthers—Calvin Caruthers."

"Ah!" and the detective scrutinized the young man closely.

So, this was Minnie May's lover.

Young Caruthers, before proceeding in his explanation, said:

"If you will help me to my feet, I think I can manage to stand."

Dick readily complied, and once he got upon his legs the young man maintained his equilibrium, although evidently very weak.

"Now, you want to know how I came in this position," he said, "and, as I am in need of a friend, I will tell you in as few words as possible."

"I was in love with a young lady of this town, but, being poor, and she being rich, I had little hopes of winning her; still I proposed. Then she disclosed a secret which made it plain that we could never be any more to each other than friends."

"So I concluded to leave this disagreeable town, and seek my fortunes in some other place. My proposed departure becoming known to the smugglers who infest this coast, they at once were suspicious."

"Jim Oaks, the ringleader of the gang, has been my enemy for years, and as I would not enter into their unlawful schemes, I have been under constant surveillance, as they feared that I would report the whole business to the Government, which, in truth, I ought have done long ago."

"So when it was announced that I was going to leave, the smugglers concluded that I would give them dead away, and bring a posse of officers down upon them. To prevent the possibility of that, they seized me, and left me here to die."

"As few people ever come out this way, and being beyond earshot of any habitation, I believe I should have perished in another day but for your arrival."

"Well, I allow you have had a pretty tough time of it. But you'll be all right soon. Come along with me."

"I cannot walk far."

"Only to the fisherman's cabin."

"Are you stopping there?"

"Yes, but only for a short time."

Caruthers looked at Dick keenly.

"You are an officer!" he said.

"Yes! What of that?"

"You are in great danger. Have you got any men with you?"

"A few. But, why do you ask all these questions?"

Caruthers smiled vaguely.

"I reckon if you had known what the place was, when you went into it, you would not have gone there," he said. "Why, that's where the smugglers store the cargo until they can get rid of it, through their agents. If your men are quartered there, you had better get them out while you have an opportunity, for they'll be killed if found there by Cast-Iron Jim and his gang."

"We don't fear Jim or his gang, and if all goes right, I will have him and his confederates in ropes by the dawn of day."

"I fear you are over-estimating yourself, my friend. It will take a powerful posse to overcome the smuggler band. It is strong in numbers, and every one is a ruffian."

"I am not vain, but you can bet all your spare change that I'll break up this smuggling racket, root and branch, before I am a day older."

"Well, if you do, you're a good one."

By this time they were nearing the cabin.

"I don't think I'd better go in," said Caruthers.

"Nonsense! Why not?"

"Because, if you are attacked, I would not be able to defend myself. I am too weak."

"Never fear, Mr. Caruthers. You will be strong, after you have eaten something, I'll wager."

The two entered the cabin. Only a dim light was burning.

The arrival of Dick with Caruthers, of course created a ripple of excitement.

"Well, Bristol, what news?" queried the general.

"No news, yet, except that it is pretty sure the Shark will arrive to-night. The gang are all at the tavern, 'töneing' up for business, as Jim Oaks is treating, which he wouldn't do under ordinary circumstances!"

"You are right," said Caruthers; "that, with him, means business."

Dick ordered another sentinel on duty, and the remainder of the party sat down while Caruthers related what he knew about the cabin.

Since he had come to that vicinity, it had always been a storehouse for smuggled goods. Before this, if report was true, it had been the storage place of the Gulf pirates, and, besides, three murders were known to have been committed there.

Believing the place to be haunted, none of the villains would occupy the room under any circumstances.

Caruthers's story had little effect upon the revenue officers.

"I guess ther' hain't any ghosts as will disturb *me*," averred Billy Bucket, rolling himself in a blanket. "I slept in a graveyard once, but I didn't see a sign of a ghost. Guess they were afraid o' *me*. Dunno any other reason."

At last the midnight hour drew nigh, and the party then left the cabin—Dick at their head.

Cal Caruthers had sufficiently recovered his strength to accompany the party.

When all hands had reached the beach, a halt was made.

"At what point is the cargo generally landed?" Dick asked.

"Right here," Caruthers answered.

"Then we had better get out of sight, but as near at hand as possible," decided the leader.

A little way up the beach, a strip of timber sloped down to the water's edge, and thus offered the required place of concealment.

"I'm inclined to think we won't see any smugglers, or smuggling vessel to-night," observed General Hastings. "All is too quiet around here."

"Maybe not," replied Dick. "But the Shark is expected."

There was nothing to do but watch and wait—which they did, only to their disgust

and disappointment, for no Shark dodged into the little land-locked harbor that night.

So there was nothing left for the officers, but to return to the cabin, and wait for another night.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE KICKER GOES INTO BUSINESS WITH SUKE.

THE Kicker, though a coward, would not bear insult without resentment, and his treatment by Jim Oaks and gang by no means improved his naturally sour temper.

He not only came near freezing, out all that night, as he was, but caught a fearful cold.

"I'll get square with the gang for this!" he growled, when he had regained his senses the next morning.

He then sought his own shanty, and while he thawed himself, he set about figuring out the problem of how he could get even.

If the detective were only out of the tavern, he might make some sort of a deal with him; but, unfortunately, the detective was not out, or, at least, the Kicker supposed he was not.

So he rolled himself in his dirty blankets in the bunk and slept away, the rest of the day.

With the evening came old Suke.

Suke and the Kicker were neighbors, and on pretty fair terms.

"How d'y', Kicker!" said Suke, helping himself to a seat. "Hear you had some trouble, last night."

"Yes, I should say I did!"

"Perty nigh friz, eh?"

"You bet!"

"S'pect you won't love Oaks no more?"

"Well, I reckon not, curse him!"

"What aire ye goin' ter do about it?"

"Get square, if it takes my scalp off, you bet!"

"In what way?"

"Dunno yet. Hain't got no plans formed, but I'll get even with him—just you remember."

"He's a purty hard man to get square with, Kicker. You'd better go careful."

"Oh! I'll not be caught napping again, never fear. This one experience has sharpened my wits."

"Kicker, I always thought purty well of you, d'y'e know?"

"Well, I reckon ye orter, bein's you've drank whisky out o' my bottle for years past, and never whooped 'em up for me once."

"Because I've always been poor, Kicker—because I've always been poor. My heart was big, but my purse was always empty. But, now, friend Kicker, I can put you in the way of makin' some money."

"How?"

"Well, purty easy, if it's worked right. It's all along of old May and his gal. Now listen: The gal ain't his darter!"

"Git out!"

"No more she ain't."

"Who is she, then?"

"The daughter of a rich Cuban lady, who is comin' here on the Shark. She comes expectin' to find and reclaim her daughter. See the p'int?"

"I think I do."

"Old May knows there's big money in this gal, for she has a fortune of her own in England, left her by a relative in case she could be found. She war, ye see, abducted from her mother when a baby. The mother will pay big to get possession of her daughter. See?"

"Yes. You've got an idea we could make a lift by abducting the girl ourselves, and holding her for ransom—that the lay-out?"

"Exactly. You couldn't hit it any straighter. The Cuban woman will shell out liberally, you can bet, and if the thing is worked clever, old May can be bled, too,

for he loves the gal the same as if she was his own."

"How do you know all this?"

"By my prophet's power."

"Oh! that be blowed! It is all rank humbug."

"It is not humbug. How can ye say that when ye know my predictions come true every time?"

"Some of them. But they were only guesswork, as any clear head could do!"

"Think so if you like. If you want to enter this scheme with me and make a thousand or so, why the chance is open. If you do not, say so, an' I'll rope in some other feller."

"If I was sure there was anything in it, I'd take a hand in the job," the Kicker returned, "but I don't take much stock in your confounded predictions. If you knew fer sure what ye war talkin' erbout, et would be different."

"Well, ef you want et straight, I do know just what I am talking about, Mr. Kicker. I was a servant in the house of Inez Gifford, after her husband, Walter Gifford, left her, and after she became rich, I was deputized to find her child. I found her, after a search of many years. Then I was inclined to give up the fact, but now I am getting old, and so much need money that I must make all I can out of my discovery."

"So you sent for the mother."

"Yes."

"She will come on the Shark."

"Yes, that is the arrangement."

"Where is the father of this girl?"

"That is hard to say. I never saw him. The last heard of him he had descended to the level of the worst wretches in London."

"Run through with his fortune, eh?"

"Yes; so it was reported."

The Kicker reflected a moment.

"When do you calculate to abduct the girl?" he asked.

"To-night, ef possible."

"The schooner comes to-night, sure, you think?"

"She orter be here, sure, as she didn't get in last night, and me lady, Inez Gifford, will be a passenger upon her. So we have no time to lose, if we expect to carry out our scheme."

"How do you expect to capture the girl?—by main force?"

"No. We must use strategy. Old Hiram is a shrewd old cuss, and always goes armed. If we were ter try force we might get salivated; so he must be decoyed from the house, and when he is away, we must get the gal and carry her off."

"Where to?"

"The stranded sloop, up the coast, in the next inlet. No one ever goes near there any more, and it will make a capital hidin' place."

"How about decoyin' the old cripple?"

"You can arrange that. You write a letter to him as Don Dare, the detective, stating that you have discovered a plot against him and his daughter, and you want an interview at some given point. See?"

"Yes."

"Well, this will lead the old chap on a fool's errand, and we shall have a chance then to carry off the girl."

"The scheme is a good one if it works," the Kicker said, "but I have my doubts about its working. Old May is a suspicious man, and won't bite at all kinds of bait. However, we can try and see how it will work. Give me a pencil and sheet of paper, and I will write the note."

This was produced, and the Kicker, who had received a good education in his youth, wrote the following, in a good style of chirography.

"MR. MAY:—

DEAR SIR:—In my professional capacity as a detective, I have learned of a plot that is being hatched against you and your daughter. If you will meet me at the harbor half a mile up the coast, I will explain, and thus enable you to save yourself trouble and danger.

"DON DARE, Detective."

This written, the Kicker read it to old Suke.

"That's all O. K. Now, then, take it and deliver it to old May. I will accompany you to the neighborhood, and, as soon as May leaves his house, we will have the gal, dead sure!"

So the two villains left the shanty in the now dusky evening, on their mission of deviltry.

CHAPTER IX.

THE HAWKS AND THE DOVE.

THE Kicker and old Suke were soon in the vicinity of the May residence.

Suke remained out of sight, while his confederate went forward to deliver the message.

When he rapped on the door the summons was answered by May, in person.

"Good-evenin', Mr. May!" said the Kicker. "Here is a letter for you!"

"A letter for me? Who in the world sent it?"

"Duano, sir, 'cept that he's a stranger stoppin' at ther hotel. He hired me to bring it. Good-night!" and the pretended messenger hurried away, to rejoin his comrade.

"You bet he was s'prised! He wanted to know who sent it, and I told him a stranger stopping at the hotel."

"All right. Let's get nearer the house, so we can see when he leaves it."

The bright light was burning in the front room, and a figure could be seen moving about.

"He's getting ready to come out," said the Kicker, eagerly. "How much d'ye think we will be able to realize on the gal, Suke?"

"Not less than three thousand dollars. I reckon—two thousand for me, the projector of the scheme, and one thousand for you."

"Oh! no you don't. We share equal, or I wash my hands of the whole business."

"Well, share alike it is, then, tho' I deserve the most for getting up the racket," Suke returned.

Ten minutes passed, then May came out.

He was accompanied to the door by Minnie, who called out after him:

"Please don't be long."

"I won't, deary; I will hasten back as soon as possible. Don't be alarmed; you will be perfectly safe for a little while."

Then Minnie closed the door, and May set out on his fool's errand, passing within a few feet of Suke and the Kicker.

The two villains chuckled softly as he hobbled by on his crutches.

"Won't he be surprised when he comes back and finds the gal gone? He'll rave an' tear his hair."

"The gal ain't gone yet," suggested the Kicker. "We hadn't better count our poultry before it is incubated. How do you propose to get the gal?"

"Oh, that can be easily done. You go to the front door and engage her in conversation. While you're doing this, I'll jimmy up the back window, gain an entrance, and steal a march on the gal, seize her, and then we will have her dead to rights for sure."

"S'posin' she carries a pop?"

"No fear; she's a chicken-hearted critter, and wouldn't dare fire one off if she had it. Come along."

So Suke went to the rear of the house, while the Kicker rapped upon the front door.

He had to rap several times before he got an answer.

Then the door was opened a crack.

"What's wanted?" was demanded.

"Is Mr. May in?" asked the Kicker.

"No, he is not. Who are you?"

"The man who brought the message."

"Well, what do you want?"

"I want an answer."

"Mr. May has gone to answer the message in person!"

The next instant there was a scream, and sounds of a struggle inside.

The Kicker threw his whole weight against the door, and being still unlatched, it flew open.

Minnie May, as we will still continue to call her, was struggling in the powerful grasp of old Suke.

It took but a few minutes to securely bind her, hand and foot, and carry her to a point some two hundred yards away from the house, where she was left in care of the Kicker, while Suke went for his old horse and cart, which he used in his fisherman's business.

After about ten minutes he returned with the go-cart, poor Minnie was bundled in, the two men mounted the seat and drove off.

The route to where the old sloop was beached was a lonesome one, but it was no comparison to where the sloop lay with her prow high and dry upon the sands.

At one time she had evidently been a good craft, but now her masts were gone, and she was a wreck, indeed.

Weeds had grown up around her, half concealing her from view, but she still contained a tight cabin that was quite habitable and comfortable.

Into this Minnie was conducted, or rather, carried, and laid upon a bunk.

"There! You remain here for the present, young lady," said Suke, "and if you behave yourself you won't be harmed not in the least—just as safe as in old May's house."

"You monster, what do you mean? Am I to be kept a prisoner in this loathsome den?"

"Yes, and you'll get your head broke if you make any noise. If you keep a still tongue you will fare all right and will be released in a few days, as soon as your mother comes."

"My mother?"

"Yes, your own real mother."

"Why, my mother is not living! She died when I was an infant."

"No, she didn't. She is coming on from Cuba to hunt you up, and we are going to turn you over to her. I s'pose you know that old May ain't your father?"

"I know nothing of the kind, sir!"

"Well, he ain't. He stole you from your mother when you was a babe. Your real name is Minnie Gifford, instead of Minnie May."

And having vouchsafed this much information the two villains freed the girl's hands and left the cabin of the stranded sloop, fastened the door, and then set off for Snug Harbor, as fast as Suke's old horse could carry them.

"If all works right we'll be rich men by this time to-morrow night!" Suke declared, with a laugh.

CHAPTER X.

WAITING.

THE day at the cabin occupied by Deadwood Dick and the revenue officers passed slowly enough to be sure.

However, they managed to spend the time at cards, and in telling stories, but Billy, tiring of the restraint, obtained consent to go to the tavern to see what was going on. Dick was of course anxious to know and thought the boy would be the best spy to send out, so consented to his going. To disguise the object of the boy's visit to the place he was instructed to buy a half-gallon of liquor and to bring it back with him.

"Keep your eye peeled while you are there, Billy," Dick advised, "and note if there is any undue excitement among the crowd. And, when you leave the tavern, take a roundabout way, and mind you are not followed. If you find you are followed, steer off into the country, and keep going until you throw your pursuers off the track."

"All right, boss. But, s'pose they keep right on followin' me?"

"You keep right on walkin'. It will do you good, and prevent your getting the gout. Besides, you will have a good chance to see the country."

Billy made a wry face.

"There's enough country around here to satisfy me," he said. "However I'm just tired of this and will take my chances."

So Billy departed, and it was a good two hours ere he returned lugging a little demijohn with him.

The men sampled the vile liquor while Dick questioned Billy. The boy had seen no special commotion. The gang appeared quiet and orderly. Some were playing cards, others were drinking; but there was nothing to indicate any undue excitement, such as the arrival of the Shark would cause.

At last night came again. The waters of the Gulf and the inlet were obscured by a dense fog. A person couldn't see twenty yards from shore, even before darkness closed in—almost always the presage of a storm in that section.

"I reckon it's going to be a blind night," Dick said, to Caruthers.

"You are right there. The humidity is just about in shape for a grand old set-to. If I'm not mistaken the Shark will land tonight. I have known them to lay off for several days, waiting for a fog like this, so they could steal in unseen."

"Do you think the landing will be at the place where we were last night? Can they make that spot in this fog and darkness?"

"The last consignment was landed up the beach, where we were last night, but this one will be pretty near here. The night promises to be so dark, they will think there is no danger of any one being around, so will come as close in to this cabin as possible."

At this juncture there came a tap at the door.

"I wonder who that is?" Deadwood Dick queried.

"Some of the smugglers, maybe," suggested the general.

"I don't think so, I don't believe they suspect we are here."

"Who's there?" Dick called out.

"Hiram May," was the reply.

Dick turned to Caruthers.

"Shall we let him in?"

"I should say yes."

Dick opened the door, and admitted May.

The old man appeared to be in a state of great distress.

As soon as he saw Caruthers, he hobbled toward him, brandishing one of his crutches in the air.

"Cal Caruthers!" he cried, "where is my daughter?"

"Your daughter, sir? I do not know. It has been some time since I saw her last."

"I believe you lie!"

"Sir?"

"I repeat it—I believe you lie."

"What causes you to say that?"

"Because Minnie has disappeared, and I can think of no one who would abduct her but you!"

"I know nothing about your daughter, sir. If I did, I should not hesitate to tell you," Caruthers replied. "When did she disappear?"

"This very night. I was decoyed away from my house, by a letter, purporting to come from one Donald Dare, a detective, stating that he had valuable information for me and requesting me to meet him at the inlet down the beach. I went there but there was no man there to meet me. On my return home, I found my daughter gone, and evidences of a struggle."

"And knowing that I was formerly an admirer of Miss Minnie, you accuse me of abducting her!"

"I can account for her disappearance in no

other way. There is or was some secret between you two, Minnie refused to divulge, which makes it all the more apparent that you had a hand in her disappearance."

"I know no more where the girl is than you do, if as much. Do you think a brother could have much of an object in abducting his own sister?"

"Brother! Sister! What do you mean?"

"I mean, sir, that when I was on the eve of proposing to your daughter, or rather she you represented to be your daughter, I discovered that I had been courting my own step-sister!"

CHAPTER XI.

A NIGHT OF MISHAPS.

THE assertion of Cal Caruthers, to the effect that Minnie May was his step-sister, created something of a sensation. Especially did it take effect on May.

"It is false!" he cried. "The girl is my daughter."

"She is not. She is the daughter of Walter Gifford, formerly of Englaad, by his second wife. Gifford, to escape arrest for his rascality, fled from England, went to Cuba, and there married a Cuban girl, and Minnie was the result of the marriage. Gifford, after a few years returned to England, having inherited a fortune there. His Cuban wife being of obscure birth, he did not want to take her with him; so he hired you, Hiram May, to abduct the child, and he left the second May Gifford in Cuba, abandoned her with your knowledge and connivance. So, Hiram, you are unmasked, at last, as you deserve. If Minnie has disappeared, it is more than likely that you are the abductor, and know just where she has gone."

"I do not; I'll swear to it!"

At length, as midnight was approaching, General Hastings called his men to order:

"Boys, are you all in trim for a hard struggle?"

"Ay! ay!"

"Weapons all in order?"

"They are."

"Then make ready; I feel confident we shall have work to do to-night—bloody work, maybe, for these smugglers are said to be a desperate lot, and we may have a hard fight."

So after a few minutes' consultation, the party, with the exception of old May, left for the beach.

By his own offer, May was left in charge of the cabin. Indeed, nothing else could be done with him.

When the officers reached the beach, it was nearly midnight, and a severe thunder-storm made the night a wild one.

The lightning, at intervals, was blinding, while the thunder caused the very earth to tremble. The rain came down in torrents, and the waters of the Gulf pounded against the coast with an angry roar.

"I don't believe the schooner will dare to venture near shore in such a storm as this," said the general.

"I've known her to, in worse weather than this," Caruthers spoke, "and, there she is!"

All followed the direction of his pointing finger to behold, by the lightning flashes, not more than half a mile away, a schooner-rigged vessel, evidently at anchor.

"Are you sure she is the vessel?" Dick asked.

"I am. Wait until you see her turn her head this way!" said Caruthers.

The lightning had not alone disclosed the ship, but had revealed the men on the beach, and at the close group a shot was fired and both Hastings and Caruthers were struck by the slugs of a small deck-gun which had opened on the officers.

"Retreat!" yelled Deadwood Dick, and this was done.

There was no use of fighting cannon.

But, at that moment, from another quarter came the boom of another gun.

Hastings rose to his elbow.

"The cutter—the cutter," he gasped, and, dropping again, prone, to at once pass into insensibility.

The men on the shore waited patiently for another flash of lightning; but it was several minutes before it came. Then there was a vivid glare that lit up the waters brilliantly.

The schooner was seen to be nearer shore than before, and the revenue cutter was not far away from her; but no further firing followed.

"I reckon they've captured her," said one of the men.

"I don't," replied Dick.

"Then why this silence?"

"I don't know. It rather puzzles me. But there's more than that which puzzles me!"

"What?"

"That we don't see any of Oaks's men on the beach."

"It is queer. Maybe they are on board the schooner?"

"That is possible."

The lightning was now less frequent, and only an occasional glimpse of either vessel was obtainable. Their positions remained very nearly the same.

What did it mean?

Dick grew anxious.

Both Caruthers and Hastings were insensible from their wounds, and Dick detailed men to carry them to the cabin; then, leaving the rest upon the beach, he set off, accompanied by Billy, on a tour of reconnaissance.

They patrolled the beach for over a mile, but discovered not a sign of Oaks or his gang.

"This is most singular," Dick declared. "I am getting really tired of this job."

"So am I!" echoed Billy. "I'd rather be back in New York, blackin' boots. D'ye think we will git any pay out of this job, now the general is laid out?"

"If we don't we'll take the town, and start a city of our own. The general, however, may only be temporarily disabled. I hope both he and Caruthers will come around all right."

Finding no traces of the smugglers, Dick and Billy rejoined their party.

The lightning now having wholly ceased, utter blackness reigned over the waters.

What the next few hours would bring forth was hard to say, but to get some knowledge of what the enemy was up to, Dick resolved to send Billy again to the tavern, ostensibly for whisky, but really, as stated, to ascertain the state of affairs there, and learn if the smugglers were aware of the close proximity of the Shark.

So he said:

"Billy, I want you to take another trip to the tavern and find out if Oaks and his gang are still there, and then hasten back."

Billy scowled.

"See here, boss," he said, "do I look like a locomotive?"

"Certainly, Billy! Your head resembles one of the old-time smokestacks, and your face is a headlight, which, if you travel with me much longer, will dazzle any man's eyes!"

"Well, I'll go. You may see me again, and you may not. If you don't, please have a brass band at my funeral, and have der feller who manipulates the base drum to pound the drum like the boomerang of a canon."

With this Billy set forth.

When two hours had passed he returned, covered with perspiration.

"Well," asked Dick, "what did you find out?"

"They're comin'!"

"How do you mean?"

"They're comin' for us. Jim Oaks is in the lead, and he swears that he will kill us

all—make a clean sweep of every man in this crowd."

"How far away are they?" Dick demanded.

"Not fur. They were purty close behind me, but I run like blazes and dodged 'em."

"How many is there of them?"

"Fifteen, I reckon, an' every one of them jist b'ilin' full of bad whisky and fight."

Dick then called the men around him.

"Boys," he said, "we are on the eve of a desperate tussle. Your leader is badly wounded, but I guess we can cope with the Oaks gang. I will manage matters. Stand ready to fight at an instant's notice."

Then, turning to Billy, he added:

"Did you notice that skiff we passed down the beach?"

"Yes."

"Do you think you could take it and row out to the cutter?"

"Yes. I kin do just that same."

"Then go. Tell Leslie to run in ashore and come to our rescue."

Billy was off like a flash, evidently glad to be out of the coming rush of the smugglers.

Time now dragged slowly, but no smuggler gang came to the attack, nor did Billy put in a reappearance accompanied by the crew from the revenue cutter.

What could be the matter? Had he been captured? or had his boat capsized, and he been drowned?

"I'm afraid Billy is a goner!" said one man.

"No fear," replied another. "Like Deadwood Dick, he has as many lives as a cat."

At last the first gray streaks of dawn began to appear; but dawn brought with it no discovery, for the waters were now in-shrouded in a heavy fog, and neither cutter nor schooner were to be seen.

"It seems useless to remain here," growled one of the men. "I don't see that we are any nearer capturing the smugglers than we were when we first came. Our captain is wounded—perhaps dead by this time, and we are all likely to be cleaned out. It is a bad job, and I, for one, am sick of it."

"That don't matter," Dick replied. "I shall stay here until I learn the fate of my boy-partner. It is all very discouraging, but we must do the best we can. Will you men promise to remain here while I go in search of Billy?"

"We will," replied the others, in a chorus. "Indeed, we cannot do otherwise now."

"Very well. Then I'm off. I'll find a boat somewhere along the inlet beach, and row out to the cutter, and see what is the matter there."

So Dick looked well to his weapons and took his departure.

There was but little danger of his being seen, but caution was needed though, for the fog might cover enemies as well as friends.

Dick had to walk over a mile, before he came to a boat that he could safely appropriate, then he discovered a dory that had been beached, but, by strenuous efforts, he succeeded in launching her, in the little cove wherein she had been run.

"I don't know whether I'll be able to sail this machine, or not!" Dick muttered, "but I can try."

It was his first attempt at sailing a boat, and yet he did not hesitate. He headed out of the cove and soon was on the open waters of the big inlet.

The little dory was so light that she was tossed about by the turbulent water, like a straw, when suddenly, she capsized, and Deadwood Dick found himself struggling in the deep waters.

CHAPTER XII.

DICK AND BILLY IN A BAD FIX.

DEADWOOD Dick, was a good swimmer; but, he had never been in such a turmoil of

water. Enveloped by fog, he swam about, until he began to give out in strength, trying to find the dory which seemed to have been swallowed by the fog.

There was a buzzing sound in his head, a strange thrill shot through his body and he sank, for the first time.

He arose, and then went down once more. This was the last he knew, until he found himself in a strange place, bound hand and foot.

The place was not familiar; it reminded him of the cabin of some sailing vessel; but there was no movement, as of a vessel upon the water.

He was lying on a heap of straw. His clothes were still soaking wet, so he knew he could not have been there very long.

But, where was he?

Hark! a voice! a scream!

Dick attempted to rise, but could not, bound as he was by a rope.

Again that scream.

"No! no! Never!" came the cry.

"By heavens, somethin' is going on here that is not right," Dick growled. "Oh, wouldn't I like to be free!"

Raising his voice Dick yelled:

"Help!"

Directly a door was opened, and some one entered—no one else than the Kicker, with a lantern in his grasp.

"Hello! here; what's the matter?" the wretch demanded.

"I want to be released!"

"How much will you pay?"

"Oh! a hundred, or two."

"It won't work. Five hundred, at the very least."

"Never!"

"Then you will rot here!"

"Rot it is then; I'll get free, in spite of you."

The Kicker uttered a harsh laugh.

"What object have you in holding me a prisoner?" Dick demanded.

"To prevent you from meddling in our business."

"I'll meddle with them, and you, too, when I get free. I'll either land you in jail, or, by heavens, I'll kill you!"

The Kicker smiled.

"Barkin' dogs don't as a rule bite!" he retorted.

Then, with an admonition to Dick to keep still, or take a clubbing he departed, leaving Dick to make the best of his bad situation.

That that was bad was soon apparent. The tide was coming in and the water was beginning to ooze through cracks in the floor.

But let us follow the adventures of Billy Bucket.

He found the boat Dick had sent him to and pulled off through the inlet out into the open sea. Unlike Dick, he had long been a wharf-rat in New York, and could pull an oar like a collegian; so the roughness of the water did not bother him particularly.

After a row of a mile or so he saw a vessel looming up right before him; but, owing to the darkness, he could not make out if she was the cutter or the schooner.

As cautiously as possible he paddled about the vessel.

She was all dark and silent. No lights were visible anywhere.

"I can't seem ter make this out," muttered Billy. "Can't be that the gang has deserted the ship?"

It surely looked so; not a person was visible on deck, that was a certainty.

Finally, Billy drew up alongside, and, in a jiffy was on deck.

But it was a disastrous move on his part, for, no sooner was he on deck than he was seized by two burly seamen, who dragged him down the companionway to the captain's cabin.

The captain was a fine-looking man, and, although engaged in illicit traffic, was not a ruffian; so, when Billy was brought before him he regarded him kindly, as he asked:

"Well, young man, where do you come from?"

"I come out of a boat!" Billy replied.

"What were you doing in the boat?"

"Rowing, sir."

"See here, my lad; you belong to the detectives, do you not?"

"Bet cher life I don't belong to any of the smuggler gangs," was the brave retort.

"I will take good care you don't get away from us," and the captain of the vessel gave orders to have Billy lashed to a mast.

This was better than being locked up in the hold, at any rate, decided the boy.

Then the captain addressed him again.

"I suppose you want to get free?"

"Of course I do!"

"Well, I'll tell you what I'll do. You give me what pointers you know about the detectives, and I'll set you free."

"Nary!"

"Then you stay confined to that mast until you do."

Day dawned and day passed, but, except for being forced to face the elements, Billy experienced no great inconvenience.

True, he couldn't see ashore, and was worried about Dick and his companions, but he was not subjected to a flogging, as he half-expected he would be.

The captain approached him several times, and tried to draw from him what he knew about the detectives, but Billy remained literally tongue-tied.

About eight in the evening the forward watch yelled out:

"Boat, ahoy!"

"The Creeper!" was the reply. "Captain Jim Oaks."

"Ah, that's the smuggler chief," muttered Billy. "Jove! I wish I was out of this fix. Thet Oaks is a cuss, from all I can hear."

A long row-boat filled with men pulled alongside, and the men came on board.

They were indeed Oaks and a part of his gang, and every man was well-armed.

For a wonder, Oaks was gaudily attired. He wore a pair of duck pants, a pair of top-boots, a white vest and brown velvet coat. His headgear was a sombrero.

The rest of his gang were dressed as usual, in rough fisherman's costume.

"Why ain't you ashore?" Oaks demanded, in a savage tone. "Don't you know your business yet?"

"Hold up! That will do!" cried the commander of the Shark. "A little of that insolence goes a good ways. I command here, do you know?"

"Oh! do you? Well, who owns the boat?"

"Well, I suppose you do."

"Then what authority have you got?"

"That of captain. If my command here is not satisfactory, say so, and I'll go ashore."

"If you do, it will be as a corpse, my man. You are a traitor. You are lying off here so that the cutter can take the vessel; but, I'll end *that* game!"

The next instant two pistol reports were heard, and the vessel captain fell, mortally wounded.

"I wouldn't give a pinch of snuff for a cent's worth of my skin," muttered Billy Bucket. "If that Oaks takes command here, I'm a goner, sure as fate."

And it really looked so.

"Chuck the noble captain in the hold," thundered Oaks, "and let him die there. I am now commander of this vessel, I want you to know, and while I own and command here, things will go *my* way."

Then turning to the mate:

"Who is that kid at the mast?"

"I don't know his name, sir."

"Don't know his name? Where'd you get him?"

"Not far from here. I reckon, accordin' to the captain that he was spyin' on us."

"Very likely."

Oaks then advanced toward the young prisoner.

Billy expected this, and was prepared for it.

"Who are you?" Oaks demanded.

"D'ye mean my name?"

"Yes."

"Well, general, I am William Henry Bucket, from New York—a politician, and so forth. On my return to 'metrop,' it is probable I may run for mayor, or for hangman at the Tombs. If you would like ter employ me thusly, just let me know. I think I could draw the cord around your head-supporter, and eat a hearty dinner afterward."

"You are one of that accursed revenue gang!" Oaks declared, "and I'll make short work of you!"

And short work he undoubtedly would have made of the boy prisoner, but, at that moment, a shot was fired by the revenue cutter. It struck the Shark and tore a big hole in the bow.

Jim Oaks rushed forward.

"Man the boats!" he cried.

In the course of five minutes the crew and smugglers were gone.

"Well, I reckon I'm a goner now, for sure," said Billy, as the vessel began to sink, steadily and rapidly.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DOUBLE DISCOVERY.

THE position of Deadwood Dick was indeed one of peril, for bound and helpless as he was, drowning must surely be his fate.

In five minutes' time he was being submerged and his fate seemed sealed at last.

In ten minutes more he would surely be covered with water, and drowned.

But help came, at the last moment, for the door opened at this juncture, and a woman entered—a handsome woman, too, of commanding presence.

She carried a lantern, to guide her.

"Didn't I hear a voice?" she asked.

"Yes. Help! I shall drown!" cried the bound Dick.

"Help you shall have!" was the reply.

In a few moments Dick was free, and on his feet, thanks to the lady.

"Who are you?" he asked, with curiosity.

"Mrs. Gifford!" was the answer.

"A prisoner?"

"Yes, until a moment ago."

"Did you come on the Shark?"

"Yes!"

"In search of your child?"

"Yes!" was the reply.

"Do you know where she is?"

"No, not yet!"

"Do you know the man in whose keeping your child is?" Dick asked.

"Yes. He was once a servant in my husband's employ."

"His name?"

"Hiram Kick. It was through him that I came to this coast."

"How so? Enticed here, I suppose?"

"He wrote me that he had found my daughter, and wanted me to come for her."

"You came on the Shark, to save time?"

"Yes. I was landed last night, toward midnight."

"And seized?"

"Yes, I was seized and brought here."

"Well, you are lucky to have fared no worse. But, we must get out of here."

"That will be no hard job, do you think?"

"That's a question!" Dick replied.

Getting out of the cabin was easy enough, and they were soon on deck; but here trouble began.

The boat was entirely surrounded by water.

"Oh! we can't get ashore," cried Mrs. Gifford, "for the full tide is on."

Dick looked about.

There were no small boats near. The water was too deep to wade, and too turbulent to safely swim, but it was swim, or drown if they remained, for the vessel was being rapidly overwhelmed.

"Can you swim, Mrs. Gifford?"

"A little."

"Well, there is only one course for us to pursue. We must make a break for the shore. The longer we remain here the greater is our peril. If we perish it is no more than we shall do by remaining here."

"Then we must take to the water, but let's give the craft a thorough search before we leave her. There may be other prisoners here; it seems to have been used by these villains as a prison."

"Well, we can make a search, but we shall have to be lively."

The hurried investigation of the old hulk revealed one cabin or co-partment which they could not get into, for it was locked.

"Some one is inside, I feel sure," declared the lady.

Dick rapped loudly on the door. "Any one in there?" he demanded, in a loud tone.

"Help! help!" came the faint response.

"By George, you are right," Dick said, turning to Mrs. Gifford. "There is a prisoner in here, and it was a woman's voice that answered. If we are to rescue her it must be done at once."

This was plain. The tide was rushing in so rapidly that the old craft was being rapidly submerged.

Dick hurled himself, with all his might, against the door—Mrs. Gifford doing the same, and the door flew open so suddenly that it prostrated both Dick and the Cubanese to the floor.

"Where are you?" Dick called out, springing to his feet, and leaving Mrs. Gifford to assist herself.

"Here! here!" was the response from one corner. "For mercy's sake release me. I am half drowned."

Dick groped forward, and found the victim—a young woman.

"What is your name?" he demanded, while releasing her of the ropes that bound her.

"My name is Minnie May," was the response.

Mrs. Gifford gave a scream.

"My child! my child! Found at last, thank God!" and the moment Minnie was released she was clasped in her mother's embrace.

"Come! there's no time to be lost. We must make an attempt to get off this boat," urged Dick.

They hastened on deck. The waters, now pouring over the bulwarks, nearly swept them off their feet.

Suddenly there was a terrific gust of wind. The old vessel pitched and lunged, and threatened to go down, but a great wave seemed literally to pick her up, and the old hulk was hurled upon the beach, high if not dry, and the immediate danger was over!

"We are saved!" Dick cried. "Let us go ashore at once."

"But where shall we go?"

"Well, I really don't know. I shall have to hunt around for some place where I can get you under temporary shelter, at least; and then seek to discover what I can about my men and the ruffians who run this accursed place."

"I think I know of a place," announced Minnie. "It's about a mile inland—a ranchman's house, and very nice people, too. I have been there frequently."

"Good! Do you think you could find your and your mother's way there alone?"

"Oh! yes."

"Then, I won't have to go along, and I can proceed at once to my investigations and work."

The ladies making no objection, Dick bade them good-by and started off in search of his own party.

He found them at last at the rendezvous where Hastings and Caruthers had been stricken down.

They were in very bad temper—in fact, on the point of disbanding.

Where was the cutter?

No one knew on account of the fog. The last seen of her, she occupied a position about the same as when she had approached the harbor.

Nothing definite was known concerning the smuggler. She had not come ashore, nor, so far as was known, had she landed any goods.

"It would be impossible to do that. A boat would swamp. This harbor is ill-named," Dick said. "There's no safety for anything in its waters. Has any one seen Billy yet?"

"No."

"Nor Oaks and his gang?"

"No."

"Well, I don't see that we can do much until this detestable fog lifts. I reckon we better go back to the cabin."

"I reckon we better walk to the nearest shipping port and make our way back to Washington," said one of the men.

"I second the motion!"

"I third it!"

Such were the responses.

"You forget one thing, gents," said Dick, grimly.

"What is that?"

"Undertakers are scarce, funerals are expensive, and turkey buzzards plenty. You take a good, healthy buzzard and he can do up a dead revenue officer in about two meals, and squawk for some more!"

"What has that to do with us?"

"Well, you try to leave this command, and see. I'll kill the first and every man who attempts mutiny. I told you this once before."

"Me lads, the captain is right, and by me faith I'll sthand up for him! We was sint here to do our duty, and begorra it's our business to sthay here till it's done. Shure, it's a little inconveniant, I'll be afther acknowledgin', but where you're sint to work, do your work!"

It was an Irishman named Ed Egan who spoke—the most sensible man of the squad, and a level-headed fellow.

"Bully for you, Egan!" cried Dick. "You've the honor in you of the service and I'll see that you are recognized."

That settled it. The other members felt rather abashed, that a "common Irisher," as they deemed him, would volunteer to stay and do his duty.

So the worn-out party repaired to the cabin, and set about making themselves as comfortable as possible. They found that Hiram May—or Hiram Kick, as he really was—had done everything in his power for the wounded men, General Hastings and Caruthers, and that they were really not dangerously wounded—which was good news for all and made Dick feel a degree of respect for May—scamp though he knew him to be.

Leaving Egan in full charge, as his lieutenant, Dick set out on a tour of reconnoissance.

He wanted to find exactly the position now maintained by the Oaks gang;—also, if possible, to find out about Billy.

Dick soon left the cabin, thoroughly disguised as a bummer-tramp. He had brought but this one disguise in coming to Snug Harbor, and this he had taken the precaution to bear with him to the cabin.

When he reached the tavern, everything was quiet but there was plenty of evidence

that nearly every man was ready for action, in case of an attack by the revenue officers, for every man about Oaks's resort was armed.

Dick wandered into the room, looked around a few minutes, and then approached the bar where Jim Oaks was on duty.

"Say, boss, I've traveled a long way, an' I'm purty near played out. Give's a drink, an' low me ter set down hyer awhile, till my duds git dry!"

"Got any money?"

"Yes, a little I picked up down at San Antonio—'nuff fer a booze, I guess. Just fix me up a nosegay what will set me warm."

"No mixed drinks here. Any one as can't take his medicine straight, can't have any."

So the bum took three fingers of raw whisky, and toddled over in a corner, and sat down on an empty barrel.

A considerable number of the men present were seamen.

Dick did not like the looks of this, for it gave rise to a question—had the Shark landed or stranded?

CHAPTER XIV.

COMING TO CLOSE QUARTERS.

LET US return briefly to Billy Bucket. When he found that the smuggling schooner was abandoned, and was going to sink, he tried to think how to pray.

It was something that he did not clearly understand how to do, having been brought up in the streets of New York, where curses take the place of prayers, ninety-nine times out of a hundred.

But he finally got off the following:

"Oh, Lord! save me from drowning. I ain't very much good at prayin', but I'm sum at blackin' boots. So, if you let me off this time, I'll go back to my old biz, and let this detective business go to thunder."

Then, after a moment's consideration he added:

"No, blamed ef I will. I jest want to get free, and ef I and Dick don't make et hot for them piruts, I'm a liar. Amen!"

The boat was settling lower and lower.

With all his might, Billy struggled to free himself. It was the struggle of desperation, and it was not in vain either, for the strained cords yielded enough to set one of his hands free, and then it was but the work of a few minutes for the lad to stand at liberty on the deck.

But to what use? How was he to reach shore?

The boat had now sunk so low that she promised to swamp at any minute.

"It is sink or swim, now, I guess," muttered Billy, "and I guess there ain't much choice between sinkin', when yer swimmin', or sinkin' with the boat."

An idea suggested itself to Billy, that if he were able to raise the anchor a bit it was barely possible the schooner might be dashed upon the beach.

He pressed forward with the intention of putting this expedient into execution; but, too late, for just then the Shark gave a sort of shuddering gasp, and sunk beneath the waters never to rise again.

Billy, of course, went down with her, but came up to the surface, and struck out bravely shoreward, following the waves.

"I'll go as fur as I kin," thought the plucky lad, "and if I don't ketch onto anything, I reckon I will have to stop and rest awhile till some one draws the water off, so I can wade ashore through the mud."

On! on! he went, buffeted by the waves, until his strength began to give out.

"It's no use!" he muttered. "I'm a goner!"

But, no! Billy Bucket was not thus to perish, for at that moment a dark object loomed up before him.

It was the little U. S. Revenue cutter!

"Help! Help!" he cried.

A rope was thrown to him and he was drawn aboard.

That's about the last he knew for an hour or more; then he was awakened by the captain pounding him vigorously on the breast.

"Well, lad, are you awake yet?" the captain asked.

Billy sat up on the bunk and looked about him, and then comprehended matters.

"Oh! ye picked me up, hey?"

"Yes. What were you doing, swimming about like a shark?"

"Just came from one."

"Were you on board the smuggler?"

"Yes."

"And what was you doing there?"

"Well, boss, I was partly proppin' up the mast and it was proppin' up me. I was a prisoner."

"Where is the boat now?"

"Under water."

"And the crew?"

"Gone ashore. They left me to sink, and took a skip. They're goin' to raise ructions on shore."

"Attack Bristol and the officers?"

"You bet!"

The captain turned to the first mate.

"Let her go!" he ordered. "Beach her if you can."

The mate gave the orders.

The anchor was hoisted.

The captain again turned to Billy, and cross-questioned him until he was satisfied the boy's story of his capture and escape was the truth.

It was not difficult for the little cutter to get ashore, and she was soon well up on the soft sand.

Immediately the beach was attained the captain said:

"Everybody arm themselves!"

This was done; then the cutter was temporarily abandoned, and the crew started off for Snug Harbor—now fully five miles distant.

It was a tiresome tramp, and as they neared the village they heard sounds of excitement, off in the distance.

"Forward!" cried Billy. "I know the way and will go first for the cabin, then for the tavern."

In the mean time, it becomes us to follow up the daring detective's adventures.

His presence at the tavern, did not appear to attract much attention—apparently owing to the fact that he was such a typical-looking tramp and bummer.

"They don't suspect me," he concluded, "and that is one point in my favor. If there's anything to be gleaned here, I'll soon know it."

The men were in a state of considerable excitement, and more evidently getting ready for some important movement.

"They're getting nerved up for a fight, if I'm any judge," thought Dick, "and it is ten to one that they intend to attack my men. If they do there will be bloodshed in earnest."

Occasionally Dick would saunter up to the bar to get a drink, hoping to catch a word of information, but in this was unsuccessful.

He would then return to his corner.

Finally he was approached by Jim Oaks.

"Well, old man, what are you doin' here?" was asked.

"Nothin' purtickler, 'cept gittin' dry on the outside an' wet on the in."

"Where did you come from?"

"Californy."

"Where are you going to?"

"Dunno, yet. Hain't made up my mind—most anywhere, where a feller can git along without work."

"What is your name?"

"Jeff Jordan."

"Can you fight?"

"Well, you bet! I kin just do that to a russet brown."

"Well, ws're goin' to have a little skirmish with the enemy pretty soon, and want to muster in all the men we can get."

"What enemy?"

"Oh! a gang of detectives who have been bothering us. Will you join us?"

"Wal, I reckon, if ye want me. Allus ready fer a fight, I am!"

"Then come up and have another drink, as a bracer."

Dick acquiesced, although he touched the liquid poison very lightly.

This drink cemented the apparent friendship between him and the smuggler chief, and prevented any suspicion that might have been rife among the rest of the gang.

They were all toughs, but Dick was about the toughest-looking one of the party, and a very fit companion, in his disguise, for the rest.

A perplexing problem now arose in his mind. How was he to get out of accompanying the gang?

The smugglers were making active preparations for a start, and Oaks soon approached the new recruit, carrying a rifle—a single-shot breech-loader.

With the exception of Deadwood Dick, there was not a perfectly sober man in the party, but all were in a fighting mood.

Before the gang left the tavern, Jim Oaks mounted a chair, and said:

"Fellow citizens! Are you all for the mutual protection of our interests?"

"We are," was the reply.

"Are you ready to fight to protect those interests?"

"We are! we are!"

"Then death to the detectives who came here to make mischief. Outside with you, and form in line, two abreast. Then forward, march! We must wipe out the whole gang—not leave one of them to go back and report, and thus bring down here the whole revenue corps to clear us out forever."

CHAPTER XV.

CONCLUSION.

THE smuggler gang filed out of the tavern, and arranged themselves in file, according to Oaks's direction; then the burly ruffian took the lead and led off at a rapid gait.

Dick, in the formation of the line, had taken good care to get a position in the rear of the command.

If an opportunity offered itself, it was his intention to drop out of file and skip for the cabin.

When they arrived within shooting distance of the cabin, Oaks called a halt.

"You fellers stay here," he ordered. "We don't want to fall into any trap, and so I will go ahead and reconnoiter. I won't be gone long. If I am, why, make a rush upon the cabin!"

At the point where the gang had halted, were plenty of big cypress stumps, and the men squatted around on these.

Dick took particular pains to get as far from the rest of the men as possible, with a view of escaping.

Many of the gang lit their pipes, and began to smoke, while all entered into a noisy discussion of the situation.

That was Dick's opportunity, but, just as he was about to steal away he felt a tap upon his back.

He looked around to discover Billy Bucket. He was crouching behind the very stump on which Dick was resting.

"Come," he whispered. "The boys are waiting only a short distance away. Now's our time."

Dick slid from the stump. The smugglers were in hot and high argument, and took no notice whatever of his movements, and in the course of a few minutes, Billy conducted him to where the revenue officers, and the ship's crew were awaiting in a chaparral near

the cabin, but off to one side. After Dick had received a warm greeting, Billy Bucket spoke up:

"Now, you fellers, ef ye'r goin' ter do bizness, do et, and then let's clear out of this place. Ef we stay here much longer, we'll all git ther epizootic."

"Are the men in a position where we have any chance of taking them?" asked the first mate of the cutter.

"They are," responded Deadwood Dick. "I am sure that by making a sudden rush, we can overpower them, drunk as they all are and Oaks absent."

"Then, lead ahead, and we will end the matter, the quicker the better."

Just then came a shot from the cabin and Oaks was seen to come staggering out of the door, closely followed by Hiram May; then again another shot, from a revolver in May's hand, and Oaks fell to the ground.

"Oh, it's May is a bully boy—he is!" cried Egan.

"Yes, he has done for Oaks, that is certain," added Dick. "Now for the gang!"

The gang had been alarmed by the shots, and then, seeing their leader fall, made a dash for the cabin, but only to be confronted by the officers and crew, headed by the bummer.

Dick advanced.

"Fire one single shot, you scoundrels, and we will not leave one of you alive!" he shouted. "And if one of you attempts to escape he will be shot down like a dog! There lies your leader, Jim Oaks. Your jig is up now! Do you surrender, or is it wipe you all out? Take your choice!"

The answer was a rifle-shot, and a bullet cut through Dick's old hat; but, a quick response came from behind him.

"Take that, ye b'ody spaldeen!" cried Egan; and, as he spoke, the Kicker, who had fired the shot at Dick, tumbled forward on his face.

"Any more av ye as wants the same?" called out the irate Irishman.

"Advance, one by one!" commanded Dick, peremptorily.

The toughs were simply paralyzed. It was all so sudden and unexpected that they were seemingly incapable of resistance, and almost mechanically they advanced singly, to be disarmed as each one came up.

Only the monster Suke tried to escape. He, at least, would not surrender. He made a break for the cover of the cypress stumps, but was not quick enough for the vigilant Egan. His rifle again spoke and the career of the wretch was then and there ended. He had plotted his last scheme of ruthless robbery and wrong.

Dick now hurried to the cabin, where May, pistol in hand, sat grimly in the door.

"Why did you kill Oaks?" Dick demanded. "I wanted him spared to make him reveal this whole business."

"He is not yet dead," May answered. "I shot him to prevent him from murdering Caruthers, whom he so hates. He tried to shoot me for defending the young man, and I gave him a second dose, which I guess will settle his accounts on this earth."

Oaks was groaning as he lay upon the ground, and Dick at once proceeded to investigate his condition. He found two wounds in the breast, either of which must prove mortal.

"Do you know me, Oaks?" asked the detective.

"Yes," he answered, in a whisper. "You are the leader of the revenue men."

"I am that. But, I am more. I am the protector of your wife and daughter—both of whom are now under my care. I know you to be not only Oaks the smuggler and villain, but also Gifford. Is it not so?"

"Yes!"

"What shall I say to your wife and daughter for you?"

The wretched man seemed tortured by his

conscience; for a moment he did not answer; then he said:

"Ask them for forgiveness. I have been a bad man to them, and now that the end has come, I realize, as I never did before, how great have been my crimes against them. Take all I have here and give it to them."

"Neither of them, I feel sure would touch a single dollar of the wealth you have obtained by this unlawful life you have led," declared Dick.

"I know!" answered the dying man. "That is just. But—ah!—good-by! I am going. Be good to them! Be good—"

A spasm—a frame tremor—a few low gasps—and the wretched man's soul was released from its earthly tenement.

"Is he dead?" asked Hiram May.

"He will never more speak again!" responded Dick, solemnly.

Minnie and her mother remained at the friendly ranchman's house for several weeks—long after Dick and Bill'y had taken leave of them, after being satisfied that the clean-out of the smuggler gang was thorough, and all the roughs had been turned over to the U. S. Revenue men, to meet their fate in the U. S. Court at Austin.

The two women were very happy in each other's presence, though saddened by the awful tragedy which had ended the career of the husband and father.

But, a new interest and care had come to command their attention and interest—the care of the wounded General Hastings and of Caruthers, Gifford, the step-son and half-brother, who had been removed to the pleasant quarters provided by the hospitable Texan, in his own house, and, under the ministrations of the devoted and gentle Minnie and her mother both came back to health and strength at length.

What wonder the general found in Mrs. Gifford—still a beautiful and attractive woman—more than a nurse and friend? and that she discovered in him a man worthy of her trust and love?

Caruthers and Minnie, as brother and sister, were inseparable companions; and when, at length, the invalids were ready to depart from the Neuces, the return was not to Mrs. Gifford's home in Cuba, but to Washington, where the general made his report and then resigned from the field force—quite content to accept the Government's handsome recognition of his services and worth in the appointment to the conduct of Secret Service Bureau for the Department of the Southwest.

In a lovely house on a fine "circle" in the Capitol City now dwell the Giffords—mother and daughter and son; the mother, however, is Mrs. General Hastings, and Minnie Gifford is a pronounced belle of the "best circles."

In that house no one is more a favorite than Richard Bristol—the restless, tireless, ubiquitous Deadwood Dick, whom the general regards as the most accomplished detective and the bravest man ever employed in the Government service.

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